

I am deeply concerned by the way congressional earmarks have exploded in recent years. Consider that in 1980 the total number of spending earmarks was about 300. But by fiscal year 2008, according to one analysis, the annual spending bills included 11,610 projects, a 30 percent increase over the previous year.

Clearly, earmarking has gotten out of control, leading to alarming waste and abuse of taxpayer resources and spending for projects that primarily serve special interests rather than the national interest. For example, in just the last few years individual members of Congress have succeeded in securing \$50 million for an indoor rainforest in Iowa and \$70,000 for the "Paper Industry Hall of Fame" in Appleton, Wisconsin. These are but two outrageous examples - and regrettably, there are far too many others - of an unaccountable process that has brought the federal government into areas that have traditionally been the purview of the private sector or state and local governments, and contributed to an unacceptable rise in federal spending. Perhaps of greatest concern, the scandals involving former lobbyist Jack Abramoff and convicted Congressman Duke Cunningham were directly connected to the practice of earmarking and questionable campaign fundraising tactics. This process is clearly broken and in desperate need of reform.

To that end, I am supporting legislation that establishes a formal process for reviewing earmarks and developing common sense reforms that would institute a greater level of accountability in spending decisions (H.Con.Res. 263). Importantly, a temporary, Congress-wide ban on all earmarks would be instituted while that review is undertaken. Despite the support of 159 cosponsors, however, the leadership in the House has not taken any action on the bill.

Of the local funding requests I have received over the years, I have generally supported only a limited number of projects, specifically those that have a federal nexus and further public health and safety or national defense purposes. In an effort to advance long-term reform efforts and until Congress adopts satisfactory permanent reforms, I recently further clarified and strengthened these criteria. Specifically, the funding cannot be directed toward a private entity. I believe this is a very important criteria because most of the allegations of improper earmarks have involved private entities. In addition, the primary purpose of the spending must be to serve one of the following public ends: a) public safety; b) national defense; or c) addressing impacts in Northern California created by federal laws or policies. I will also post my funding requests on my website, including an explanation of how the project meets these criteria, so the constituents I represent have the transparency they deserve and expect.

These more stringent criteria represent important reforms that I believe, if incorporated into the larger budget process, could greatly improve spending accountability. While they will enable me to advocate for funding for truly federal priorities in our area, they will also likely mean that I will not be able to lend my support to some other local projects that may otherwise be meritorious. These are difficult decisions, but with spending spiraling out of control and an earmark process that has fostered public corruption, a lack of spending accountability and taxpayer mistrust of congressional decision making, I believe we must take some dramatic steps toward longer term reforms.

Ultimately, the best way to restrain spending and prevent abuse is to ensure that members of Congress have an opportunity to understand, debate and strike from legislation projects that are wasteful or do not serve truly national priorities. To that end, I am also cosponsoring legislation (H.R. 631) that requires every earmark to be in the text of legislation. Currently, most earmarks are located in a "report" accompanying the bill, which means they are not subject to full transparency and debate on the House floor. By requiring these items to be included in the text of legislation, members of Congress will have an opportunity to strike wasteful spending through amendments.

As someone who is committed to fiscal responsibility, limited government and a balanced federal budget, I realize limiting earmarks alone will not solve our budget problems. Ultimately, spending discipline will require more stringent budget controls, including, perhaps, a balanced budget amendment, to ensure we live within our means. Also, we will not be on sound fiscal footing as a nation unless and until we fundamentally reform our federal entitlement programs, principally Medicare and Social Security, which are expected to account for all federal spending by 2050, leaving nothing for transportation, defense, homeland security or other federal priorities. But limiting the number of earmarks and adopting common sense reforms to restore transparency and accountability will go a long way toward cleaning up a broken process and restoring taxpayer trust in congressional spending decisions.

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